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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview for a communication curriculum that has begun to include cultural diversity as part of its overall assessment process. First, the paper introduces the topic of assessment as it relates to cultural diversity and the student at-risk. Then the paper reviews the literature related to students at-risk and culturally-based differences in oral communication competency and public speaking. Next, the paper presents results of pre- and post-assessment of the oral communication competencies of students of diverse gender and ethnic backgrounds and students at-risk. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results of the assessment process and recommendations for further examination of the communication discipline's procedures for assessing oral competency. (Five tables of data are included; 47 references are attached.) (RS)

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ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT: CULTURAL DIVERSITY, ETHNICITY, AND STUDENTS AT-RISK

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Abstract

Partly as a result of increasing national interest in accountability, a movement toward assessing oral communication competency has arisen within the communication discipline. In regard to such assessment, the intercultural literature indicates that some culturally-based differences in oral competency exist and should be considered when students of various ethnic backgrounds are assessed. That literature also suggests that these students may not be prepared to improve as much as other students because of the Western tradition and Aristotelian roots of the typical communication curriculum. Considering such indicators, a need exists to re-examine the process for assessing the oral communication competencies of students of various ethnic backgrounds, and most particularly, such students who may be at-risk.

This paper overviews a communication curriculum that has begun to include cultural diversity as part of its overall assessment process. First, the paper introduces the reader to the topic of assessment as it relates to cultural diversity and the student at-risk. Then it reviews the literature related to students at-risk and culturally-based differences in oral communication competency and public speaking. Next, results are presented of pre- and post-assessment of the oral communication competencies of students of diverse gender and ethnic backgrounds and students at-risk. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results of the assessment process and recommendations for further examination of the communication discipline's procedures for assessing oral competency.

ORAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT: CULTURAL DIVERSITY, ETHNICITY, AND STUDENTS AT-RISK

National interest in effective assessment of oral communication competency is increasing (Backlund, 1990; Crocker-Lakness; 1992; Hay, 1992). Concern for assessment in the communication discipline may be partially a result of the current focus on accountability and accreditation. A 1991 survey of accrediting agencies indicates that colleges and universities in the middle, southern, and western regions have been mandated to include the assessment of oral communication in their accountability efforts (Chesebro, 1991).

In addition to increasing national interest in assessment, there are indicators of concern regarding how various student populations will, or will not be, assessed. For example, the assessment of oral competency, as it relates to cultural diversity and students at-risk, is emerging as a pivotal concern of communication educators. During a recent national conference, Speech Communication Professionals and Students at-Risk (Beall & Ratliff, 1991), concern was evidenced among communication scholars regarding assessment as it relates to certain student populations. Scholars attending the conference addressed varying issues related to the implementation of appropriate accountability and assessment procedures for students at-risk. Specifically, five issues regarding accountability, assessment, and the student at-risk were addressed (Morreale, 1991):

1.) Should assessment or testing of students at-risk occur? If so, for what purpose?

2.) What are the considerations in clarifying the terms related to accountability and assessment, and how do these terms interrelate?

3.) What should be considered in terms of adequate psychometric testing and other methods of assessment?

4.) What should be considered in implementing appropriate accountability and assessment procedures for the student at-risk population?

5.) What resources and materials are available in regard to accountability and assessment of the student at-risk?

As the assessment of oral communication becomes more a part of academic institutions, and as student populations become more culturally diverse, and in some cases more at-risk, the next logical issue is the effective assessment of the oral competencies of such students. The intercultural literature indicates that there may be culturally-based differences in oral communication and public speaking. Other literature calls attention to an increase in the numbers of students at-risk. Taken in combination, these literatures call for increased discernment when assessing the various communication competencies of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and students who may be at-risk.

This paper overviews the assessment component of a communication curriculum at a four-year institution, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS), which incorporates both cultural diversity and at-riskness into its overall assessment process (Morreale, Hackman, Shockley-Zalabak, & Gomez, 1991). First, the paper introduces the reader to the topic of cultural diversity, communication assessment, and the student at-risk.

Then, the academic literatures related to students at-risk and culturally-based differences in oral communication competency and public speaking are reviewed. Next, the results of pre- and post-assessment of the oral communication competencies of students of culturally diverse backgrounds, diverse in gender and ethnicity, and students at-risk are presented and discussed. Included in that assessment process are speaking, listening, interpersonal, and overall competency; communication apprehension and its subsets; and self-esteem. The paper concludes with a discussion of applications of this research by UCCS Communication Department faculty and future directions for those efforts.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY, COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY, AND THE STUDENT AT-RISK

Promoting cultural diversity in institutions of higher learning typically reflects a commitment to academic excellence for students of all ethnic and racial backgrounds. Sometimes it is perceived as an attempt to redress the wrongs of previous generations. More realistically, it is the realization that America's social profile is changing radically along ethnic and racial lines. The "global village" concept has become a reality; therefore, it has become apparent that colleges and universities must recognize the necessity of preparing their students for active roles in a multiracial, multiethnic world. Consequently, there is growing awareness of the importance of developing a more inclusive and culturally diverse student population. This awareness usually

implies major changes for which many institutions have not prepared--changes that are immediate and long-range.

Immediate changes are reflected in recent challenges to colleges and universities for more efforts in the recruitment and retention of ethnic minorities (SUNY, 1990). Such recruitment has been successful in many institutions, but recently the retention of ethnic minorities was called into question. At the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, for example, minority enrollment has increased over the past five years, but the percentage of minorities receiving bachelor's degrees dropped 5 percent, a drop from 12.3 to 7.3 percent (Tischer, 1992).

Long-range changes related to cultural diversity will require careful planning because they call for the implementation of new programs, new curriculum, and perhaps new approaches to assessment of students' competencies in many areas. The speech communication discipline has begun to recognize the importance of the need for innovative programs and ongoing research regarding cultural diversity issues. Relatedly, oral communication competency and its assessment are of concern to the discipline. Most particularly, concerns related to cultural diversity and assessment of oral communication have taken on greater importance. For example, recently published SCA policies call the discipline's attention to whether communication assessment instruments are free of cultural bias regarding gender, ethnicity, etc. (Crocker-Lakness, 1992).

Concomitant with the discipline's increased concern for oral competency assessment and cultural diversity, other new programs

are focusing attention on specific needs of the at-risk student (Ayers, 1992). This student is less likely to be successful in the academic setting, usually due to a combination of factors. Such factors contributing to a potential at-risk situation may include actual or perceived culturally-based differences. In fact, race and ethnicity have been correlated with dropout rates and therefore the at-risk profile (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990).

What is the relationship of communication competency assessment, ethnicity, and the student at-risk? Recent research suggests that ethnicity may be related to the communication orientation (that is, to communication apprehension and self-perceived competence) of students at-risk (Chesebro, McCroskey, Atwater, Bahrenfuss, Cawelti, Gaudino, & Hodges, 1992). Additionally, it might be expected that students from cultures other than the dominant Anglo American culture may have oral communication and public speaking styles that differ from the Western or Aristotelian model (See Sprague, 1991). In the latter case, appropriate assessment of students becomes difficult, and particularly so if they are at-risk.

The complexity of these issues suggests a need to examine more closely the discipline's approach to the oral communication competency assessment of students outside the dominant culture, including those who may be academically at-risk. An important dimension of such assessment is speech evaluation. Public speaking represents a communication context in which culturally-based

differences might be particularly problematic for the student at-risk. The following review of literature provides a background to this area of the communication discipline, including a description of students at-risk and the oral competencies and public speaking behaviors that may be expected based on the cultural or ethnic background of the speaker.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order for a student to be successful in higher education in the United States, he/she must learn to communicate in the style of discourse as it has been traditionally taught. As Sprague (1991) asserts, "In general, upper or middle class males of European heritage will find that the voice of their personal identity and social identity will blend easily with the voice of the academy. Students who do not fit this mold are more likely to face conflicts between their individual or cultural discourse styles and the sounds of success." (p.13)

Sprague thus calls attention to the Western and/or Aristotelian roots of the typical communication curriculum. Considering those roots, a need exists to better understand the process for assessing and evaluating the oral communication competencies of students of various ethnic backgrounds and, most particularly, such students who may be at-risk.

Students At-Risk

Increasing concern regarding the academic attainment of students at-risk was addressed by a Speech Communication

Association national conference on the subject (Beall & Ratliff, 1991). That conference yielded and reviewed a wealth of information and research regarding the student at-risk population. For example, definitions and descriptions of the term "at-risk" proliferate. The following three definitions are frequently used to describe this student:

1. "The term 'at-risk' or 'high-risk' is a theoretical concept based on an implicit assessment of the degree of negative risk associated with the educational experience" (Hunter and Ratliffe, 1991, p.2).

2. "The at-risk student, by strictest definition, is on the verge of failing in an academic setting and thereby seriously limiting his/her chances of entry into either/both the next academic level and/or the working world" (Fahs, Brock, & Zeuschner, 1991, p.3).

3. The at-risk student may be characterized as "going through the educational process without gaining a significant benefit from it, perhaps dropping out of that process or getting through it while becoming older but not theoretically wiser." (Frana, 1991, p.3).

Since the term "at-risk" conjures up a multiplicity of definitions, it is prudent to make mention of risk factors potentially characteristic of this population. Green (1983) suggests that variables such as being a commuter student versus living on campus, part-time versus full-time school attendance, minority status, low income economic status, attending a public institution,

etc. tend to be correlative factors in placing a student at-risk or in becoming an attrition statistic. (Note the inclusion of "minority status" as a variable that is potentially characteristic of being at-risk.)

The academic condition of college students, those who might be defined as at-risk, is reflected in the high attrition rate of such students (Green, 1983). The statistics are high regarding such students' probability of dropping out (LeCompte and Dworkin, 1991). Green states that "most retention efforts attempt to improve the quality of the student's collegiate experience, both academic and nonacademic" (p.4). Recent efforts to retain students at-risk are described in an array of conference papers and convention programs within the communication discipline (See Ayers, 1992; Beall & Ratliff, 1991; Fahs, Brock, & Zeuschner, 1991; Frana, 1991; Lane, 1991; Sudsweek, 1991; Von Till & Stull, 1991).

Recent empirical research efforts also have focused on various aspects of communication, students at-risk, and ethnicity. Of particular note is a benchmark study that examined the communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence of 2,793 at-risk students (Chesebro, et al. 1992). This study examined the attitudes toward communication of academically at-risk junior high school students from across the country. Compared to national norms, these students reported the following contrasts: (a) modestly higher communication apprehension but substantially more apprehension about dyads and small groups than the national norm; (b) substantially lower perceptions of their own

communication competence overall and particularly regarding communication with acquaintances and strangers. This study also examined whether ethnicity is related to the communication orientation of students in at-risk environments. Ethnicity was found to be highly predictive of the proportion of students classified as highly communication apprehensive and as seeing themselves as low in communication competence.

Culturally-based Oral Communication, Public Speaking, and Assessment

American colleges and universities represent a microcosm of the population at large and as such are becoming increasingly multicultural, (Shankar & Carroll, 1991). Casmir (1991) states that meeting the challenge of developing students of diverse cultural backgrounds requires "reexamination of the perspectives, theories, and methods that may be appropriate only to the majority culture" (p. 233). Stiggins, Backlund, and Bridgeford (1985) point out that "oral communication skill assessment procedures have to be particularly sensitive to cultural bias, as different cultures, or even sub-cultures within our country, do not have uniform experience with common types of speaking situations" (p.136). They further state that "test items based on inappropriately narrow cultural perspectives are problematic because competent examinees who happen to lack understanding of the cultural perspective reflected in the items may be inappropriately judged incompetent" (p.136). Since a potential for bias exists, it is necessary for educators to be aware of some of the differences in oral

communication behaviors as well as differences in perception of competent public speaking among people of different cultures (Mohsen, 1990).

As a point of definition, intercultural public speaking relates to oral/verbal discourse by people of different cultural backgrounds to an audience in a public forum. The audience may be of similar cultural background, or it may be a mixed audience.

The following is a summary of research describing oral communication and public speaking behaviors that may be evidenced based on the ethnic/ cultural background of the speaker. The ethnic groups described are Anglo American, African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American. These groups were selected based on U.S. Census Bureau categories for collecting demographic data. Before reviewing oral behaviors, it is important to keep in mind that as ethnocentrism has a negative connotation, great care must be taken to avoid stereotyping people. Stereotypes tend to erect walls of mistrust and exclusivity rather than building bridges of understanding and inclusivity. Therefore it is noted that the following clustering of groups might suggest ethnocentric bias or stereotyping. It is important, too, that cultural generalizations not be understood as absolutes. These generalizations and approximations will not necessarily apply to every individual within a particular noted culture.

Anglo American

Sitarim and Cogdell (1976) make the observation that Anglo American communicologists say that in the final analysis only three

variables--expertise, dynamism, and trustworthiness--account for a public speaker's success or failure. They also state that of these three variables, expertise and dynamism are most important. For example, according to Sitarim and Cogdell, an Anglo American public speaker who is an expert in the subject matter being addressed is more apt to be accepted by his/her audience than one who is not an expert. Speakers, therefore, are required to quote from contemporary opinions, recent studies, current research, etc. Dynamism, usually determined by a speaker's good looks, posture, etc., is also an important factor for success in public speaking (Sitarim & Cogdell, 1976). Another aspect of dynamism is the delivery of the message which relates to such things as the speaker's appearance, posture, gestures, movement, voice, articulation, and pronunciation (Dance & Dance, 1986). According to Dance and Dance, effective delivery does not call attention to itself; rather, it allows the audience to truly understand one's message--it is not synonymous with "showmanship." Eye contact also has been identified as an aspect of dynamism. Sprague and Stuart (1988) write that speakers should maintain eye contact 85 percent of the time they are speaking. They state, "In our culture, looking into another's face connotes openness and interest, while looking away or down is interpreted as a sign of insincerity, or shiftiness" (p.265). Blankenship (1986) observes that to the Anglo speaker, order gives meaning, and through order we see relationships the speaker draws between his/her words.

Style is another important characteristic of Anglo American public speaking. According to Sprague and Stuart (1988) "In the context of speaking, style is simply your choice of words and the way you string them together" (p 218). The first prerequisite of effective oral style is clarity. "Fuzzy and ambiguous communication are discouraged" (Sprague and Stuart, 1988, p.218) Beardsley (1956) emphasizes that effective style should be clear, appropriate and vivid. Beardsley maintains that effective style is not only clear, but it must also be appropriate to the speaker, the audience and the occasion. For example, the language may be formal or informal, and the tone may be conversational, or forceful, or humorous, depending on the purpose of the speech, whether it be informative, persuasive, or entertaining. A speaker may project an impressive quality through the appropriate use of such devices as imagery, metaphor, and simile, personification, alliteration, etc. (Sprague and Stuart, 1988).

African American

According to Sitarim and Cogdell (1976), "The African brought to America a great oral tradition, generating and sustaining powers of the spoken word, rather than the written word, since a slave was forbidden to read or write, which forced him to be fluent and proficient in the art of rhetoric" (p.126). Mitchell (1970) states that an appreciation of African-American oral communication and public speaking style and effectiveness cannot be gained without placing their speechmaking in the context of the Black church. It is a well-known phenomenon that the African-American preacher has

been a model public speaker in addition to being a leader of the community. The traditional Black preacher masters storytelling and may place himself into the sermon as a biblical character. Mitchell (1970) notes that the Black preacher merges stories logically with present-day needs in narratives based on the stories of Moses, David and Goliath, Job, and the crucifixion of Christ. The African-American speaker characteristically speaks with dynamic delivery and emotive force and tends to be electrifying and to arouse emotion.

African-American speakers often use short, easily remembered sentences. However, they use them with rhetorical flair that stems from use of poetic devices of style--i.e. repetition, symbolism, assonance, alliteration, rhyme, and antithesis. One need only recall Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, or Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign speech, to wit, "We're going from the outhouse, to the courthouse, to the Statehouse, to the Whitehouse."

Asian American

Samovar & Porter (1981) contend that although many subcultures are grouped as Asian American, the broad perspective can give some understanding of their public speaking behaviors. Sitarim & Cogdell's (1976, pp.118-121) research is summarized in the information that follows.

Asians find Western culture's logical, linear, to-the-point approach to be blunt and abrupt. They are more inclined to suggest and look for nuances and subtle shadings. Sitarim and Cogdell

(1976) explain that Asian speakers are usually reluctant to express their ideas and feelings clearly since subconsciously they are concerned that by doing so they might damage the whole atmosphere of interpersonal harmony. In Asian cultures, images play a prominent part in how the people think and how they express themselves. They feel that more can be accomplished by what is hinted at or obliquely stated than by what is accomplished by forthright statements. Asians, especially Japanese, do not readily express negative opinions for fear of offending or causing arguments, which they abhor. To them, harmony has a higher priority than accuracy, so they tend to avoid controversial or negative remarks. Because Asian speakers adhere to their people's culture exceptions and respect their traditions, the speaker makes a special effort to use lofty language that is figurative and high sounding. The Asian speaker uses ancient books and philosophers as authorities and will quote lines from the Vedas, Sutras and Koran, since contemporary opinions are not well accepted. Asian public speakers, unlike their emotional African-American counterparts, are restrained and dignified, and their speeches tend to be long and usually--from a Western perspective--rambling. As a matter of fact, the longer the speech, the better it is accepted by an Asian audience.

Without any parallel in the Anglo or African-American public speaking behaviors, silence is of utmost importance in Asian culture. For example, during a speech, audiences are required to maintain absolute silence. Asians believe that noise breaks the

speaker's chain of thought and the audience's concentration. Totally contrary to Western culture, applause during a speech is sometimes considered the equivalent of booing or catcalls designed to ask the speaker to shut up. Some Asian speakers ask their audiences not to applaud even at the conclusion of their speeches. Such a request is complied with because to discuss it is an indication of the speaker's modesty--a significant Asian virtue.

Moran (1985) notes that Asian rhetoric is steeped in tradition and is highly ritualistic. Differing markedly from American speakers, Japanese speakers give trustworthiness precedence over expertise and dynamism. Their pattern of message structure is characterized by indirect circular forms of organization which are most consistent with their native language and cultural experiences.

According to Lanier (1990), within the Asian culture there is much less eye contact among Japanese than among other people. Particularly in Japan, eye contact at the time of a speech is considered bad manners. Therefore it is common for a Japanese to look sideways while speaking. Japanese consider Americans who look straight into the eye of a Japanese audience to be arrogant and attempting to show superiority. In this they are just the opposite of the Arabs (who have been clustered into the Asian culture) who are apt to stop when walking together to look directly into the other's eyes while they talk.

Hispanic and Native American

The Hispanic American population presents a challenge because the label "Hispanic" encompasses all the Spanish speaking ethnic groups in this country: Puerto Ricans, Cubans, South Americans, Latin Americans, Spaniards, Mexicans, and all the indigenous Hispanics in the United States. In a study of one of these subgroups, McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond (1985) examined communication apprehension of Puerto Rican students from various colleges and universities. They report that the Puerto Rican students generated much lower norms than comparable U.S. groups relating to their communication in Spanish but much higher norms relating to their communication in English. A related study by Applebaum supported these findings (1986). Mexican Americans were more apprehensive in their second language, English, than they were in their native language.

A pilot study by Keaveney and McEuen (1990) tested the levels of communication apprehension of minorities enrolled in a summer program designed to assist minorities and/or disadvantaged students in developing skills necessary to succeed in college. Included in the study were Blacks and Hispanics. The researchers found that Hispanics had significantly higher levels of communication apprehension than Blacks.

Other related studies of Hispanics include Powell and Avila's (1986) study on communication competency and classroom success. Using the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (Rubin, 1982), they tested Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White university

students. Whites scored significantly higher than any of the other groups. Flores (1991) reported on training workshops which focused on the development of competency based interpersonal communication skills designed to help increase the self-esteem of Hispanic migrant students. Workshop members role played communication scenarios and then participated in oral analysis of the communication competencies demonstrated in the role playing. Collier (1988) identified conversational competencies for Mexican Americans, Black Americans, and White Americans which were then compared and contrasted with previously identified intracultural competencies. Her findings indicate that rules for conversing with members of one's own group are different from rules for intercultural conversations with the exception of Mexican Americans.

By comparison to Hispanic Americans, there is less empirical research regarding the oldest indigenous group, the Native American. They are usually fewer in numbers in institutions of higher learning. They also represent a culture whose richly traditional cultural beliefs and values make them unique and who have been too long misunderstood. A dated study by Lujan (1979) identified communication behaviors of Native Americans. Data were gathered on observed classroom communication behaviors of Native Americans; a comparison of classroom behavior with communication behavior in non-classroom settings; and on the results of the PRCA which was correlated with the other findings. A more current study by Turchen (1991) describes a program at Dakota Wesleyan University

focusing on issues in higher education and the American Indian. The goal is to recruit and retain and to develop programs and curriculum which will assist the American Indian. Their courses include more communication classes because they have found that Native Americans tend to be apprehensive about oral assignments in the communication classroom. As with the previous ethnic groups, both Hispanics and Native Americans obviously present some cultural differences that may impact their oral communication behaviors and public speaking styles.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The preceding review of literature tends to confirm the viability of further examining oral communication competency and its assessment, as related to cultural diversity, ethnicity, and at-riskness. Such research could make a meaningful contribution to the discipline's understanding of culturally-based differences in oral communication generally, and public speaking particularly. The objective of such research would be that all students' oral communication be evaluated and assessed equally, in light of any differences related to the ethnicity or at-riskness of a given student. The data collection, analysis, and discussion presented in this paper represent such a preliminary research effort. These data were collected as part of an ongoing pedagogical and research effort conducted by the Center for Excellence in Oral Communication, under the direction of the Communication Department at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs.

Both Communication Department faculty and the staff of the Center's oral communication laboratory endeavor to apply their awareness of cultural diversity and oral communication to the particular needs of all students. For example, graduate teaching assistants who staff the laboratory are trained to recognize that students from different cultures may have culturally-based differences in oral communication and in preferred public speaking styles. The assistants are asked to take these cultural factors into account when listening to and grading students' speeches and when providing feedback in the laboratory setting. Laboratory staff are encouraged to respect the communication differences of all cultures, to be sensitive to their own ethnocentrism, and not to measure the oral competency of others based on their own cultural yardsticks. In laboratory-based courses such as the public speaking class, students are instructed to adapt their speeches to the topic, audience, and occasion, taking into account any relevant issues of cultural diversity. Additionally, speeches from culturally-diverse groups are incorporated as examples of great speeches provided as models for students in class. In sum, the pedagogical goal of faculty and staff is to sensitively educate all students, including those who are at-risk, relative to cultural diversity, ethnicity, and oral communication competency. To support that goal, Communication Department faculty are engaging in research to better understand these sensitive issues. Specifically, faculty conduct ongoing assessment and data collection related to all students' oral communication

competencies, communication apprehension, and self-esteem. The results of the analysis of those data are used to redirect a variety of Departmental and Center processes and programs.

The following data collection and analysis were intended to develop greater understanding regarding several research questions. When exposed to the same coursework and pedagogical experiences in the classroom and in the Center's laboratory setting:

1) Do male or female students experience similar or different changes in communication competency, self-esteem, and communication apprehension?

2) Are there any significant differences, based on ethnicity, in changes in communication competency, self-esteem, and communication apprehension?

3) Do students at-risk and those not at-risk demonstrate similar or different changes in communication competency, self-esteem and communication apprehension?

METHOD, DATA COLLECTION, AND ANALYSIS

Sample/Participants

In order to investigate the research questions, pre- and post-assessment data were collected and analyzed from approximately 300 students who had been enrolled in and completed the basic public speaking course during four academic semesters. Of the sample population of over 300 students, 186 were female and 117 were male. Data were collected by ethnicity for 287 Anglos and 54 Ethnic Minorities; 273 not-at-risk and 70 at-risk classifications were

assigned to student responses. The at-risk student, as designated by the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, is "a student in need of academic support, such support including but not limited to: administration of diagnostic and assessment instruments, faculty and peer tutoring, laboratory/learning center assistance, and counseling" (Morreale, Hackman, & Gomez, 1991, p. 4). At-risk students are identified by the University's computerized "early warning system," which includes students who (a) do not meet the Colorado Commission on Higher Education admissions requirements: (b) have a cumulative or semester GPA below 2.0, five or more cumulative incompletes or drops; or (c) have two or more incomplete or drops per semester (Morreale, Hackman, & Gomez, 1991).

Data Collection

As part of the course requirements of the basic speech course at UCCS, all students engage in entrance (pre-) and exit (post-) interviews in a laboratory setting. The entrance interview occurs within the first two weeks of each semester, the exit interview during the last two weeks. The interviews are conducted by graduate teaching assistants who staff an oral communication laboratory. During the entrance interview, the student sets personal goals for the course. The achievement of those goals is evaluated in the exit interview. Three assessment instruments are administered in the entrance and exit interviews: (a) The Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (CCAI) assesses speaking, listening, interpersonal skills, and overall competency (Rubin, 1982); (b) The Personal Report of Communication

Apprehension (PRCA) measures a person's anxiety about communicating in groups, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. A score is generated for each area and for overall anxiety (McCroskey, 1970); and (c) Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) rates a student's self-reported sense of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). The PRCA and the RSE, both self report instruments, are computerized for ease of administration to the student and for fast scoring. The CCAI is interactive; its scores are based on actual observation of the student's display of competencies by a graduate teaching assistant.

Following the administration of the three assessment instruments in the entrance interview, the results of the assessment process are used to advise students of their strengths and weaknesses and of any needed assistance available to them. Following the administration of the instruments in the exit interviews, students compare pre- and post-scores and discuss improvements and any remaining communication concerns.

At the conclusion of each academic year, students' pre- and post-scores on the three assessment instruments are entered in the database of the University. Since that database can access the student information system, a variety of statistical analyses can be performed correlating students' scores with any variables of interest, such as grade point average, age, gender, or ethnicity.

Primary Data Analyses

For purposes of this study, t-tests were used to compare students' pre- and post-scores on the three assessment instruments.

Three sets of t-tests were calculated. To investigate research question one, the total population was classified based on gender and t-tests were used to compared pre-post differences of males and of females. To investigate question two, first the population was classified by ethnicity (Anglo, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American) and t-tests were calculated. Additionally, the total population was divided into two groups, Anglo and Ethnic Minorities (Ethnic Minorities representing Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American as one sample population) and t-tests were calculated. Finally, to investigate research question three, t-tests were used to compare the pre-scores and post-scores of students at-risk to those not at-risk.

In Table 1, the pre- and post-scores of females and males on all three assessment instruments are presented.

Insert Table 1 About Here.

As the data in Table 1 indicate, females and males improved to a statistically significant degree as demonstrated by an increase in overall competency, a decrease in overall apprehension, and an improvement in self-esteem scores.

In Table 2, pre- and post-scores on two assessment instruments, the CCAI and the PRCA, are presented, based on the ethnicity of the students.

Insert Table 2 About Here.

As the data in Table 2 indicate, Anglo-American students demonstrated statistically significant improvement, with an increase in overall competency and a decrease in communication apprehension. In regard to overall competency and communication apprehension, the magnitude of pre-post differences of other ethnic groups did not appear to be as great as those of the Anglo group. However, since the size of the ethnic samples varies so greatly, sample size calls these findings into question. Noting that fact, the four Ethnic Minority groups were collapsed into one sample and t-tests were calculated accordingly.

In Tables 3 and 4, the pre- and post-scores of Anglo and Ethnic Minority students on three assessment instruments are presented.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 About Here.

As the data in Tables 3 and 4 indicate, the collapsing of the scores of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students to create a larger sample, increased the magnitude of improvement on all assessment instruments for Ethnic Minorities as a total group. Note that in Tables 3 and 4, both Anglo and Ethnic Minority students demonstrated a statistically significant increase in overall competency and in the subsets of speaking, interpersonal,

and listening; they also demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in overall communication apprehension and in the subsets of groups, meetings, conversations, and public speaking. For the self-esteem scales, Anglos demonstrated statistically significant improvement, while the improvement of Ethnic Minority students was not statistically significant.

In Table 5, the pre-test scores of at-risk students are compared to the pre-test scores of students not at-risk; and the post-test scores of those at-risk are compared to post-test scores of those not at-risk.

Insert Table 5 About Here.

As the results in Table 5 indicate, there is no significant difference between students at-risk and those not at-risk, regarding any dimension of oral communication competency or self-esteem. Regarding communication apprehension, the only statistically significant differences between the two student populations relate to public speaking apprehension and overall apprehension. Both groups of students demonstrated a five point decrease in public speaking apprehension between the pre- and post-tests. At-risk students demonstrated a twelve point decrease in overall apprehension and students not at-risk demonstrated a ten point decrease in overall apprehension.

Secondary Data Analyses

In addition to the primary analyses, the following secondary analyses were performed. Using the same students' scores as in the primary data analyses, 2x5 factorial analyses of variance were calculated of pre- and post-tests, by gender and ethnicity. Theses analyses indicated no significant main effects of gender or ethnicity and no significant interaction effects.

DISCUSSION

The first research question was, "Do male or female students experience similar or different changes in communication competency, self-esteem, and communication apprehension?" The results of this study are reasonably conclusive in that there were no significant differences based on gender. Both females and males improved approximately equally and significantly regarding all dimensions of oral communication competency, communication apprehension, and self-esteem.

The second research question was, "Are there any significant differences, based on ethnicity, in changes in communication competency, self-esteem, and communication apprehension?" The answer to this second question is somewhat less conclusive than the answer to question one. When sample sizes of ethnic minorities were somewhat small, ranging from 4 to 22, there was less significant improvement between pre- and post-scores for minority students than for Anglo students. This result supports the earlier findings of Chesebro, et al., in which ethnicity was predictive of

both higher communication apprehension and seeing self as low in communication competence (1992). However, there were no significant differences in this study, based on ethnicity, when the sample size was increased to a range of 45 to 54 students.
Also in regard to ethnicity, there is no simple accounting for the differences in magnitude of change in self-esteem for Anglo students as opposed to Ethnic Minority students. Interestingly, although self-esteem scores did not improve as much for Anglo students, they started out higher and ended up virtually the same as Ethnic Minorities.

The third research question was, "Do students at-risk and those not at-risk demonstrate similar or different changes in communication competency, self-esteem, and communication apprehension?" Results of this study suggest that there are no significant differences, based on at-riskness, except in regard to public speaking and overall apprehension. Interestingly, by comparison to earlier research (Chesebro, et al., 1992), at-risk students in this study reported lower post-scores for communication apprehension than students not at-risk. This difference in research findings is potentially explained by closer examination of both studies. The earlier study assessed communication apprehension of students-at-risk who had not received the benefit of any treatment program. The students at-risk in the present study had successfully completed high school and demonstrated lower apprehension on post-scores following a sixteen week laboratory-supported experience in public speaking. Of particular note in the

results of data analysis for research question three, is the lack of any significant difference based on ethnicity regarding either communication competency and its subsets or self-esteem. The only differences based on the at-riskness of the student appeared to be related in some way to communication apprehension.

This study has raised more questions than it has answered. The primary data analyses yielded some differences, albeit minimal, based on ethnicity and at-riskness. If the goal is to develop the oral competencies of all students equally, future research is called for that speaks to the limitations related to sample size in this study.

APPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

At the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, both Communication faculty and staff are committed to developing greater understanding of oral competency assessment, cultural diversity, and students at-risk. Through the review and pedagogical application of the results of research in these areas, the oral competencies of all students will be better served. Faculty intend to continue to empirically analyze the impact of their courses and laboratory-based support programs. Additionally, long-term tracking will be conducted of all students while at the University and over their careers upon departure from the institution.

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Table 1:
T-Tests, by GENDER, Comparing Pre- and Post-Scores for Communication Competency Assessment Instrument[3] (CCAI) (1990-1992), Personal Report of Communication Apprehension[1] (PRCA) (1990-1992), and Self-Esteem[2] (1991-1992).

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
CCAI Overall					
Females	186			-12.41***	.000
Pre		73.02	8.93		
Post		81.56	8.05		
Males	117			-8.17***	.000
Pre		74.37	9.32		
Post		81.53	7.02		
PRCA Overall					
Females	215			13.77***	.000
Pre		65.59	16.13		
Post		53.93	13.95		
Males	128			9.62***	.000
Pre		62.48	14.88		
Post		52.38	12.90		
Self-Esteem Overall					
Females	87			-6.28***	.000
Pre		31.46	4.90		
Post		34.00	4.25		
Males	57			-3.42**	.001
Pre		33.25	4.63		
Post		34.88	3.56		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Note: An increase in scores on the CCAI and the Self-Esteem is positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.

Table 2:
T-Tests, by ETHNICITY, Comparing 1990-1992 Pre- and Post-Scores for Communication Competency Assessment Instrument[1] (CCAI) and Personal Report of Communication Apprehension[1] (PRCA).

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
CCAI Overall					
Anglo	256			-13.20***	.000
Pre		73.75	8.84		
Post		81.65	7.64		
Black	13			-2.57*	.025
Pre		75.62	9.39		
Post		80.15	6.56		
Hispanic	17			-4.27**	.001
Pre		70.24	8.90		
Post		79.18	7.74		
Asian	11			-4.53**	.001
Pre		71.64	13.82		
Post		82.09	10.15		
American Indian[a]	4			-1.95	.146
Pre		70.00	11.80		
Post		85.25	3.95		
PRCA Overall					
Anglo	287			15.05***	.000
Pre		64.16	15.69		
Post		53.18	13.46		
Black	15			4.05**	.001
Pre		59.60	16.38		
Post		49.13	14.85		
Hispanic	22			5.86***	.000
Pre		67.32	12.83		
Post		55.00	11.69		
Asian	12			2.72*	.020
Pre		72.75	19.76		
Post		59.08	12.67		
American Indian[a]	5			3.86*	.018
Pre		55.20	8.29		
Post		43.40	10.64		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$
Note: An increase in scores on the CCAI and the Self-Esteem is

Table 2 (continued)

positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.

' American Indian scores for 1991-1992 only.

Table 3:
T-Tests Comparing Total Anglo-American Population Pre- and Post-Scores for Communication Competency Assessment Instrument[3] (CCAI) (1990-1992), Personal Report of Communication Apprehension[1] (PRCA) (1990-1992), and Self-Esteem[2] (1991-1992).

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
CCAI Speaking	267			-14.94***	.000
Pre		27.66	4.15		
Post		31.28	2.99		
CCAI Interpersonal	264			-9.60***	.000
Pre		32.07	4.20		
Post		34.80	4.36		
CCAI Listening	265			-8.30***	.000
Pre		14.58	3.12		
Post		16.38	2.57		
CCAI Overall Comm	256			-13.20***	.000
Pre		73.75	8.84		
Post		81.65	7.64		
PRCA Group	288			4.89***	.000
Pre		14.30	4.84		
Post		12.68	5.55		
PRCA Meeting	288			7.51***	.000
Pre		15.60	5.10		
Post		13.64	4.32		
PRCA Conversation	288			8.71***	.000
Pre		13.88	4.13		
Post		11.86	4.13		
PRCA Public Speaking	288			17.82***	.000
Pre		20.22	5.29		
Post		15.38	4.55		
PRCA Overall Comm App	287			15.05***	.000
Pre		64.16	15.69		
Post		53.18	13.46		
Self-Esteem	121			-7.32***	.000
Pre		31.87	4.88		
Post		34.36	4.09		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Note: An increase in scores on the CCAI and the Self-Esteem is positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.

Table 4: T-Tests Comparing Total Ethnic Minority[6] Population Pre- and Post-Scores for Communication Competency Assessment Instrument[3] (CCAI) (1990-1992), Personal Report of Communication Apprehension[1] (PRCA) (1990-1992), and Self-Esteem[2] (1991-1992).

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
CCAI Speaking	47			-6.01***	.000
Pre		26.85	4.41		
Post		30.38	3.39		
CCAI Interpersonal	46			-3.65**	.001
Pre		32.37	4.64		
Post		34.76	4.28		
CCAI Listening	46			-3.31**	.002
Pre		14.46	2.84		
Post		15.91	2.39		
CCAI Overall Comm	45			-6.53***	.000
Pre		72.11	10.55		
Post		80.71	7.83		
PRCA Group	54			3.61**	.001
Pre		14.20	4.57		
Post		12.32	3.93		
PRCA Meeting	54			4.92***	.000
Pre		16.50	5.18		
Post		13.83	4.53		
PRCA Conversation	54			4.49***	.000
Pre		13.94	4.41		
Post		11.63	3.43		
PRCA Public Speaking	54			9.26***	.000
Pre		20.43	4.62		
Post		15.15	4.04		
PRCA Overall Comm App	54			7.69***	.000
Pre		65.26	15.98		
Post		53.20	13.31		
Self-Esteem	23			-.81	.429
Pre		33.74	4.54		
Post		34.26	3.60		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Note: An increase in scores on the CCAI and the Self-Esteem is positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.

[6] Ethnic Minority = Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian.

Table 5: T-Tests of 1990-1992 Pre- and Post-Scores for Communication Competency Assessment Instrument[3] (CCAI), Personal Report of Communication Apprehension[1] (PRCA), and Self-Esteem[2] Comparing Students At-Risk to Students Not At-Risk.

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
CCAI Speaking				.71	.480
Pre					
At-Risk	69	27.13	3.77		
Not At-Risk	273	27.50	4.34		
Post				1.79	.077
At-Risk	66	30.55	2.96		
Not At-Risk	253	31.28	3.09		
CCAI Interpersonal				-.13	.901
Pre					
At-Risk	70	32.29	3.60		
Not At-Risk	272	32.22	4.83		
Post				.51	.610
At-Risk	64	34.58	3.42		
Not At-Risk	251	34.84	4.52		
CCAI Listening				.39	.700
Pre					
At-Risk	70	14.47	2.79		
Not At-Risk	273	14.62	3.10		
Post				.94	.347
At-Risk	65	16.09	2.22		
Not At-Risk	250	16.40	2.62		
CCAI Overall Comm				.40	.689
Pre					
At-Risk	69	73.35	7.60		
Not At-Risk	272	73.78	9.65		
Post				1.42	.159
At-Risk	61	80.43	6.46		
Not At-Risk	245	81.80	7.88		

Table 5 (continued)

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
PRCA Group					
Pre				.41	.680
At-Risk	73	14.04	5.02		
Not At-Risk	302	14.31	4.66		
Post				.17	.864
At-Risk	67	12.54	7.00		
Not At-Risk	277	12.69	4.88		
PRCA Meeting					
Pre				1.78	.077
At-Risk	73	14.85	4.79		
Not At-Risk	302	15.98	5.13		
Post				1.65	.101
At-Risk	67	12.96	4.14		
Not At-Risk	277	13.90	4.43		
PRCA Conversation					
Pre				.97	.335
At-Risk	73	13.44	3.94		
Not At-Risk	302	13.94	4.25		
Post				1.19	.236
At-Risk	67	11.42	3.58		
Not At-Risk	277	12.02	4.37		
PRCA Public Speaking					
Pre				1.33	.187
At-Risk	73	19.63	5.02		
Not At-Risk	302	20.51	5.23		
Post				2.76**	.007
At-Risk	67	14.18	3.74		
Not At-Risk	277	15.65	4.58		
PRCA Overall Comm App					
Pre				1.33	.187
At-Risk	73	62.14	16.03		
Not At-Risk	302	64.89	15.52		
Post				2.41*	.018
At-Risk	66	50.14	11.59		
Not At-Risk	277	54.12	13.91		

Table 5 (continued)

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
Self-Esteem					
Pre				-.66	.512
At-Risk	33	32.73	4.67		
Not At-Risk	132	32.12	4.94		
Post				-.84	.407
At-Risk	28	34.82	3.10		
Not At-Risk	116	34.23	4.20		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Note: An increase in scores on the CCAI and the Self-Esteem is positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.